

Portrayal of Women in Padmarajan's movie "*Thoovanathumbikal*"

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ABSTRACT- P Padmarajan is a Malayalam author screenwriter and director, famous for his realistic representation of life through his works. Through his characters, he represents his sense of life, lifestyle and morality and questions the concerns of the society. The delicate idea of relationship is presented by him in various point of views, of various characters, in each of his story. Padmarajan was successful in making delicate subjects acceptable for all common audience. *Thoovanathumbikal*(Dragonflies in the Spraying Rain) released in 1987 is one of his very famous movies, which is partly based on his novel *Udakappola*(Water bubble) and was a sensational one, as it questioned the moral system existed in Kerala of the 80's. The movie is all about a man Jayakrishnan who is leading a dual life. He falls in love with two ladies. One of them is a village girl and other one is a prostitute. Then the movie revolves around the conflicts in the relations. The idea of prostitution he presented through this work was an alien concept for the society at that time. Later, when deeper meanings were taken under consideration, like, the delicacy of relations, and the power, strength and idea of love within women, the movie gave many other dimensions for thought.

This research paper is going to analyse the ways in which Padmarajan is presenting the women characters, i.e. Clara and Radha. The mode of representation of these women, the power play each of them possess in the movie and a deeper analysis on relations, moral concerns. The paper also reviews the feministic concept which Padmarajan tries to present through the movie and the way he tries to question the patriarchal society in which he is also a part of.

KEYWORDS -Feminism, Patriarchy, Stereotype, Sexism, Morality, Independence

INTRODUCTION-Padmarajan was born on 23 May 1945 in Alappuzha, Kerala. He was noted for his fine and detailed screenwriting and expressive direction style. His movies

included masterpieces like *Oridathoru Phayalvaan* (There Lived a Wrestler, aka Once There Was a Wrestler) (1981), *Koodevide?* (Where is Your Nest?) (1983), *Namukku Parkkan Munthiri Thoppukal* (Vineyards for us to dwell in) (1986), *Thoovanathumbikal* (Dragonflies in the Spraying Rain) (1987), *Innale* (Yesterday) (1989), *Season* (1989) and *Njan Gandharvan (I am Gandharvan)* (1991). His short stories were famous for its unique content and the style of presentation and his novels were considered as classics, which easily conveyed the thoughts and emotions which may evoke the innate feelings within a naïve human being.

Thoovanathumbikal narrates the story of Jayakrishnan (acted by Mohanlal) a well-to-do bachelor who lives a life of dual nature. The writer/director gives us a brief idea on his life as if, in his village he is a gentleman, who cares for his wealth and reputation. Whereas in town he is having a dark image, which is partially immoral. Later on, he meets a girl Radha (acted by Parvathy), who is a distant relative and he falls in love with her in the first sight. When he confesses his love, she rejects and Jayakrishnan moves on. The story continues when he meets Clara (acted by Sumalatha), through one of his friends, Thangal, who is a pimp. Jayakrishnan under the pressure of situation, gets into physical relation with Clara, where he finds that she is a virgin. He promises Clara to marry her, as he vowed to himself that he would not be in physical relationship with a virgin girl unless she was his wife, which she refused politely in order to safeguard Jayakrishnan from any kind of social outrages. Then on the next day she disappears. A bonding beyond explanation was born in between them in that night which remained buried within Jayakrishnan for a long period of time.

On the course of time Radha, from her brother finds that Jayakrishnan was not bad as she thought and also finds purity in his soul and falls in love with him. When Radha meets him, he confesses to her about Clara and but on the contrary Radha didn't react and admires his sincerity and pure heart. When he meets Clara again, he tells her about Radha and her proposal, she supports Radha and ask him to get married, she didn't want to be a part in between them. Later Radha and Jayakrishnan decided to get married. It was at that times, he got a call from Clara that she wants to meet him. He goes to the railway station to meet Clara even after Radha asks him not to. Radha also reaches there without the knowledge of Jayakrishnan, to be the witness of the event. There, both gets surprised when they realise Clara is married and became the mother of a child. Clara leaves with the train and it was their

final meeting. The story ends where Radha and Jayakrishnan reunite at the railway station. Other than the final meeting, whenever Clara and Jayakrishnan met, it rained.

CLARA -Clara is one of the delicate characters in the story and one of the strongest characters ever portrayed in Malayalam cinema. She was from a coastal fisherman community and wanted to escape from the clutches of her stepmother. It is portrayed that she herself was in full concern to be a prostitute. All she wanted in life was to travel around the world and to have safe place to live and for that she could have chosen a life with Jayakrishnan. But there comes the beauty of the character. She flies. She never wanted to be a burden in anyone's life.

Even though Clara is a prostitute she is not portrayed as a disgusting personality which has been a common stereotype. She has a character of her own. She has got the power of decision making which can be seen throughout the movie. Choosing this career, moving forward with it, challenging the words or offer of a man in a patriarchal society etc. shows the boldness of the character and the power of her decisions. We cannot see her being guilty or ashamed of choosing this profession. But she sometimes regrets on cheating Thangal, the pimp who brought her to the profession. These instances show the dedication she is giving to her profession.

Clara's thoughts are more realistic than fictitious or emotional. When Jayakrishnan acts emotionally on various situations, she makes him choose the right path as she makes him think of the realistic situations. Whenever Clara and Jayakrishnan are together or whenever a thought about Clara comes to the mind of Jayakrishnan, it rains. It symbolises the romance between them or in a wider sense the audience can associate rain with Clara herself.

Clara was attracted to Jayakrishnan, when she finds out that he was so naïve towards her and was like an open book when she was near him. Rather than his manliness or social influence, what she likes was the pure heartedness within him. It was this attraction that made her love him. This love made her leave him, as she wanted to save his life from getting any accusations from others. Even in the end when she is married, she says that it is not only for her, but also for Jayakrishnan, as it may help him to forget her. Clara always has an upper hand in Jayakrishnan's life. She has a commanding power over him. The relation between them is so delicate that, someone outside them may think it is immoral or "uncultured".

RADHA-Radha is a silent character in the movie. She is a well-educated middle-class girl, who follows the “norms” of the society. Her character has a stereotypical style of representation. There is nothing new to show in her character other than a common portrayal of a middle-class teenage girl. When she meets Jayakrishnan for the first time, reacts vigorously. She reacts without a second thought, even without thinking about ‘how the other may feel’. The situations where she shouts are very less in the movie, even when she is angry. Later on, her emotions are expressed mostly through facial expression and not in the form of words. This shows the self-made restrictions she herself imposed in her life. The concept of patriarchy and sexism that makes women feel they belong underneath men and makes them follow a calm and silent life is reflected in the character of Radha.

Radha’s love towards Jayakrishnan is a bit problematic compared to that of Clara’s. Radha’s love towards Jayakrishnan is just because of an admiration she felt for him when she heard heroic stories about him. She was just attracted to his acts of manliness. The fascination she has on Jayakrishnan is deep. As any other woman she is also very possessive towards him and dedicates her life for him. In the contrary, Jayakrishnan was much authoritative towards her, since she was ready to bear it. She was anyway expecting for a life like that, following the patriarchal patterns. She always wanted to lead an ordinary life, without breaking the social constraints. The best example of this is the moment when she came to know that Jayakrishnan will go and meet Clara. Even at that point she couldn’t express her resistance or anger towards him.

Radha didn’t want to lose him under any circumstances. She mentally had a little bit of fear upon that. It is because of that care and love; she suppressed her difficulties and anger. She is a woman who needs empowerment, but herself denies the need for it. She herself believes that, sacrificing her life for a man is everything. For that most of the times, she becomes passive.

CONTRASTING IDEA

The contrasting thing we may come across in the story is that Clara even after making her own decision, gets physically exploited. Whereas Radha is in a safer environment even though she had to make some sacrifices. The difference can be noted at the end, that Clara herself makes a choice to get out the profession and she marries on her own choice. Whereas

breaking the social norms which she followed for several years by Radha is too hard for her. Radha has no other option rather than to bow down to the old, traditional patriarchal ways.

It is not required for women to sacrifice their freedom, just because their life will be safe. The world is not only for men but also for women to explore. The fear of failure, being independent and craving for secure is the main reason for Radha for not becoming like Clara. In other words, these factors act against the empowerment of women.

Anyway, this contrast can be explored further and gives a more option on further studies by considering the factor that, whatever women do they will finally end up in the clutches of the patriarchal society. The point that, in the end of the movie even Clara becomes a housewife is a valid point for the argument.

CONCLUSION-This research paper finds that Padmarajan has made the representation of Clara and Radha with an idea of the contrasting women categories in the society. The background, social status, social consciousness, actions, mindset and ideologies of each are well-defined in the movie. The power play each of them possess or asserts over Jayakrishnan varies due to their own personal ideologies and believes. This gives an idea on how women are themselves given an opportunity to get exploited. The movie gives us a clear-cut picture on patriarchy and sexism, as it suggests that to an extent women themselves are giving opportunities for men to be patriarchal and sexist. At this context the movie gives a feminist reading, where women should have some of the qualities which Clara possesses, like boldness, decision making power, proper social awareness etc and not to be like Radha where she becomes a mere follower or admirer of Jayakrishnan and just lives an ordinary life under the power of man i.e. Jayakrishnan.

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